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ABSTRACT

Studies examining the influence of peer pressure on the drinking behaviors of college students have focused primarily on undergraduates. Very little is known about the drinking patterns of graduate students. To compare drinking patterns of undergraduate and graduate students, 57 college freshmen, 20 sophomores, 24 juniors, 26 seniors, 46 graduate students, and 7 unclassified students completed a questionnaire which measured how each subject would resist peer pressure to drink. The questionnaire consisted of six vignettes, each portraying a social situation which college students were most involved in while drinking. For each vignette, subjects responded for the protagonist who did not feel like drinking in the particular situation described. In addition, the amount and frequency of alcohol each subject consumed was measured and a Total Quantity and Frequency (TQF) variable was computed. The results revealed no significant difference between graduate and undergraduate students in Resistance to Pressure to Drink (RPD) scores or in their total TQF scores. No significant differences were found in RPD scores when analyzed by age or by year in school. A significant difference was found between men and women, with women showing more resistance to the pressure to drink. No significant differences were found for RPD scores of subjects with different TQF scores. Further research is needed to determine which variables are affecting graduate students' drinking habits. (NRB)

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Drinking Behavior Among Graduate and Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

Resistance to peer pressure to drink (RPD) was examined among graduate and undergraduate students. It was postulated that graduate students would be more resistant to peer pressure and would consume less alcohol. These hypotheses were not supported. Further analyses revealed, at the .05 level, gender differences in RPD, class differences in RPD, and differences in grade point average and amount of alcohol consumed.

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Drinking Behavior Among Graduate and Undergraduate Students

Studies concerning the influence of peer pressure on the drinking behaviors of university students have focused primarily on the undergraduate population. Incidences of drinking have been positively correlated to peer interactions in dormitories (Ingra and Moos, 1979), Greek letter social organizations (Gusfield, 1961) and informal social settings (Hanson, 1972). Such findings underscore Harford, Wechsler and Rohmar's (1983) assertion that college drinking is primarily a social activity. In contrast to undergraduates, very little is known about the drinking patterns of graduate students, particularly those in the helping professions, whose own alcohol use behaviors can influence attitudes concerning alcohol abuse (Engs, 1980; Kilty, 1975). It is the purpose of the present study to contribute to our knowledge on the role of peer pressure among university graduate students and clarify some inconsistencies within the literature concerning academic standing and quantity and frequency of alcohol consumption.

In the only known study of peer influences on graduate student drinking, Kilty (1978) found that perceived expectations of friends had little to do with drinking. In this study, comparisons were made between samples drawn from a rural community, a graduate school of social work and a state correctional facility. The students and prison inmates indicated positive social expectations about drinking, but demonstrated less willingness to comply with those expectations. Similarly, Banks and Smith (1980)

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reported that undergraduates, whether heavy drinkers or not, rejected the idea of peer pressure as a cause of drinking. However, Shore, Rivers, and Berman (1983) argue that newer and younger students have greater needs to gain acceptance from peers and would thus more readily conform to peer influences to drink. In the present study, it was hypothesized that graduate students would show more resistance than undergraduates to peer pressure to drink.

Several inconsistencies appear in the literature concerning demographic variables and quantity and frequency of alcohol consumption. Engs (1977), in a national survey of 1128 college students, found no significant difference in drinking related to year in school. In contrast, Harford, Wechsler and Konmar (1983) reported increases in frequency of light drinking by year in school for both men and women and that frequent heavy drinking decreased by year in school for women but not for men. Similar results have been found with other studies that suggest drinking practices change with year in school (Banks & Smith, 1980, Hanson, 1972 and Straus & Bacon, 1953).

Another idea needing clarification concerns the interrelation between higher education, academic standing and alcohol consumption. Hanson (1972) showed an association between higher education and alcohol consumption. In this study people who completed 13 or more grades had higher frequencies of drinking than those adults with 10 - 12 years of school or those with less than six years of school. Studies on academic standing suggest lower

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levels of alcohol consumption for those with higher grade point averages (Engs, 1977) or status in the top third of their class (Shore, Rivers, & Berman, 1983).

A question arises in applying this data concerning year in school and academic standing to graduate students. Presumably because graduate students have attained higher levels of education they would tend to drink more than undergraduates. However, entrance requirements for most graduate programs stress high academic achievement. Thus, it remains to be seen whether graduate students would consume less alcohol than undergraduates. In sum, the present study considered two hypotheses:

1) Graduate students would show more resistance than undergraduates to peer pressure to drink and

2) Graduate students would consume less alcohol than undergraduates.

Also various independent variables will be examined to determine their relationship to consumption of alcohol and resistance to peer pressure.

Method

Subjects

The questionnaire used in the current study was given to one hundred and eighty students at Wichita State University. Fifty-seven Freshman, twenty Sophomores, twenty-four Juniors, twenty-six Seniors, forty-six Graduate students, and seven students who were unclassified, completed the questionnaire. The students were recruited from various classes (some of which received extra

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credit for participating). The questionnaire was administered to students at convenient times in a classroom setting. Upon administration, instructions were given and a consent form was obtained. A summary of the results of the study was promised to participants who requested it.

Instruments

Six Vignettes

Six vignettes developed by Shore (1981) were used to measure how each subject would resist peer pressure to drink alconolic beverages. The vignettes portrayed six situations, that had been found to be the social situations college students were most involved in while drinking alcoholic beverages (Shore, 1981). The six situations were: in a bar, in a car, at a party, at a large formal party, in a dormitory, in a fraternity, or sorority, and on a date (Shore, 1981). Each vignette described a protagonist, who was not an abstainer, but who either did not feel like drinking in that situation, or who had been drinking and did not want another drink. The subjects were asked to respond for the protagonist in the six situations (eg. How likely would it be that the protagonist would not have another drink?) and to report what they would do if they were in those situations (eg. If you were in the protagonist's position, and like the protagonist, did not feel like drinking, how likely would it be that you would not have another drink?) (Shore, 1981). The subjects answered both questions by choosing a position on a seven-point Likert scale that ranged from "almost certain" to "not likely at all" (Shore,

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1981). To control for any gender biases, Shore (1981) also developed a male and female version of the six vignettes by presenting the protagonist in a female voice for the female version, and in a male voice for the male version.

By totaling the answers to the subjects' twelve responses, a Resistance to Pressure to Drink (RPD) score was obtained. Shore's (1981) original six vignettes included a third question after each situation that measured the subjects' Desire to Refrain from Drinking (DRD). However, since the present researchers were only interested in the RPD score, the question measuring the DRD scores was not included. It was felt that the omission of the DRD scores would not detract from the effectiveness of the vignettes, since Shore (1981) reported the RPD scale to have an internal consistency of .83. The present researchers also changed the names of the cities and towns on Shore's original vignettes, in order to comply with the area and state in which the research was being performed.

Quantity-Frequency Index

Jessor, Graves, Hanson, & Jessor's (1968) high school version of the Quantity-Frequency Index (Q-F) was used to measure the amount the amount and frequency of alcohol each subject consumed. The high school version of the Q-F Index is a paper-pencil questionnaire that measures how often a subject consumes beer, wine, or spirits and the amount of each that the subject consumes at one sitting (Jessor et al., 1968). The information obtained from each subject can be converted into one Q-F score

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that represents the total ounces of absolute alcohol consumed per day. Jessor et al, (1968, 168-169) arrived at four advantages to this scoring procedure:

1. It summarizes, in a single figure, quantity, frequency, and range of consumption of beverages differing in alconolic content.

2. This figure, average onces of absolute alcohol consumed per day, is readily comprehensible and can easily be translated into other meaningful units, such as "beers" or "drinks."

3. The score permits the calculation of group statistics such as means and medians which are not possible when discrete descriptive categories are employed.

4. The score is continuously distributed along a single dimension permitting correlational analyses, tests of differences between group means, and other statistical comparisons.

These four advantages convinced the present researchers to include the Q-F Index in their investigation, since the main purpose of this research was to statistically determine as many differences as possible among the drinking behaviors of graduate and undergraduate students at Wichita State University.

Demographic Information

Separate from both the vignettes and the Q-F Index, each subject was asked to answer items concerning demographic information. The present researchers arrived at ten demographic varia-

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bles, which included: age, gender, income level, martial status, living arrangement (ie. apartment, house, number of roommates, etc..), major, grade-point average, number of hours worked outside of school, race, and year in school. It was felt that these variables would be important for in-depth statistical comparisons, clarifying some present inconsistencies in the literature, and generating future research.

Procedure

The subjects were recruited from a variety of undergraduate and graduate classes. A brief statement was made encouraging individuals to participate in the study by completing the questionnaire at a time that was convenient for them in a designated classroom. This was done so that individuals would complete the questionnaire under similar conditions to avoid confounds. When the subjects arrived in the classroom they were given instructions regarding the nature of the study, the anonymity of their answers, scoring instructions, and were encouraged to ask any questions regarding the study. They were then given a statement of informed consent to read and sign. The questionnaire was then given to the subjects to complete, usually taking from ten to fifteen minutes to complete. The individuals were told that a summary of the results would be made available to them at their request. However since the results of the study were still being analyzed at the end of the semester, participants were informed of the results via an article in the student newspaper of preliminary results.

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Results

Initially condescriptive analyses were computed on the 180 subject sample, which revealed a highly skewed distribution on the Total Quantity and Frequency (TQF) variable, at the low end of the drinking scale. To help with computations the Log of TQF was calculated and used for the majority of computations. The mean age of our sample was 25, 23 for undergraduates and 29 for graduate students. Also, our sample contained mostly, 168, commuter students.

The first hypothesis was not supported. A t - test showed no significant difference between graduate and undergraduate students in Resistance to Pressure to Drink (RPD) scores. Examined by year in school (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate), a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed no significant difference in RPD scores. Upon further examination, those questions pertaining to what the protagonist would do (OTHERRPD) and those questions about what the subject would do (SELFRPD) were separated and an ANOVA was calculated by class group for each set. There were no significant differences by class for SELFRPD, but for OTHERRPD there was a significant difference " F (4,168) = 2.55, $p < .05$]. A Scheffe comparison for means testing revealed that the difference occured between sophomores and juniors [F (4, 168) = 5.52, $p < .01$].

In testing for gender differences, a one-way ANOVA showed a significant difference between male and female students, with female students showing lower RPD scores (more resistance to

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pressure to drink) { $\underline{F}$ (1, 177) = 4.18 p. < .05}. However, separated by age groups (18-20, 21-23, 24-29, and 30-57 years of age), a two-way ANOVA revealed no differences in RPD scores.

To test for the interaction of amount of alcohol consumed (TQF) and Resistance to Pressure to Drink (RPD) the subjects were divided into four groups: abstainers (a score of zero), low consumers (the bottom 25% of our sample) middle consumers (middle 50%) and high consumers (top 25%). A two-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences among any of the groups on their RPD scores.

In reference to the second hypothesis, a $\underline{t}$ -test showed no significant difference between undergraduate and graduate students in their TQF scores. Again broken down by year in school, a two-way ANOVA showed no significant differences among the classes in their TQF scores. Separated by age groups, as for RPD, the TQF scores also showed no significant differences.

To examine gender differences, a one-way ANOVA was computed for males and females by using their L-TQF scores. No significant difference between male and female students was found by their TQF scores.

Additionally, a two-way ANOVA for year in school by grade point average showed a significant difference { $\underline{F}$ (4, 169) = 22.35, p. < .05}. The results indicated that, except for sophomores (who had the lowest grade point average), GPA improved progressively by year in school.

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Discussion

This data fails to support the first hypothesis that graduate students would show more resistance to peer pressure to drink than undergraduate students. This is in agreement with Kilty's (1978) finding that friends' expectations had little to do with drinking habits, but is contrary with Shore et al. (1983) who suggests that newer students having greater needs for acceptance may use alcohol to attempt to fit in. Our findings may be in part be due to the urban university setting, where most of the students commute to the university. Also, our sample consisted of "non-traditional," older students, as opposed to Shore's (1983) sample of more "traditional," younger students. Older students. A non-traditional students have a greater amount of commitments and less time and incentive to drink recreationally than traditional students.

Surprisingly, females showed more resistance than males to pressure to drink, but appeared to be drinking similar amounts of alcohol. The greater peer resistance for females seems contrary to the traditional sex-role expectation that women be compliant and accommodating. This might be explained by acknowledging the cultural acceptance of male drinking behavior as more acceptable than female drinking behavior. It follows that, although females are drinking similar amounts, they may be drinking for reasons other than peer pressure or they may be less willing to self-report succumbing to peer-pressure. Further research is necessary to clarify this issue.

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In addressing the second major hypothesis, again the data did not support the premise that graduate students drink less than undergraduates. Examining both class and age by amount of alcohol consumed revealed no significant differences.

Further research is needed to determine which variables are affecting graduate students' drinking habits. If it is not peer pressure, level of education, sex-role differences, or GPA then what factors are interacting to trigger drinking behaviors and initiate drinking patterns? Perhaps long range studies tracking drinking habits, before, during, after the college years might yield more clues regrading what influences drinking behavior. It is crucial that those students training to be leaders in the helping professions (and those already leaders) be especially knowledgeable about drinking behavior. It is they who will be designing prevention and control programs for the rest of the population, for they are the ones who give advice day after day to the public.

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